Lateral

Journal of the Cultural Studies Association

Practical Strategies of Disruption for Dismantling White Supremacy in Ontario's Education System

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ABSTRACT This article examines the Ontario education system's use of surface level practices intended to counter racism but that often fall short of creating authentic and sustainable change. Many schools across the province have focused their efforts on celebrating identity awareness days, weeks, and months, yet these initiatives largely reveal an apparent disconnect in understanding of the significant impact of white supremacy that is deeply embedded within the educational structural system. Stories from students, families, and community members reveal ongoing, often unintentional, acts of harm or violence against Indigenous, Black, racialized, and marginalized students, demonstrating a deep-seated failure to address systemic racism. The article explores the presence of harmful ideologies of white supremacy frameworks that permeate every facet of the education system, including the curriculum, communication, disciplinary actions, assessment, and institutional traditions and practices. By examining these issues, the article offers strategies for disrupting these structures, in order to dismantle white supremacy from the education system to support and empower Indigenous, Black, racialized, and marginalized students. By providing these practical examples rooted in a transnational solidarity lens, the article aims to empower educators to disrupt and dismantle white supremacy in the classroom and promote meaningful and long-lasting change.

KEYWORDS Canada, Ontario, activism, decolonial, education, white supremacy

Introduction

My identity, as an Indigenous Afro-Palestinian Muslim elementary school educator encompasses far more than words can capture. It represents my ancestral

heritage, historical legacy, and enduring essence of being, guiding my commitment to resisting ongoing colonial occupation and the erasure of Palestinians and Palestine from history. However, I acknowledge the challenges of discussing these issues, recognizing that my own identity is a product of both colonialism and resistance against it. As an immigrant-settler, I have an unwavering commitment and solidarity with oppressed and colonized communities globally. In her book *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*, Angela Y. Davis captures the essence of solidarity, emphasizing the interconnectedness of various movements, underscoring the necessity of mutual support in our collective struggle against oppression and apartheid.[1]

By embracing my intersectional identity and lived experiences of myself, family, and ancestors, I aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding racism, discrimination, and oppression. This article is a modest contribution to the broader movement against structures of white supremacy, rooted in my experiences, knowledge, and education. Through my stories and insights, I hope to plant seeds of resistance and hope, fostering a legacy free from racism, discrimination, and oppression in our education system.

This article draws upon principles from cultural studies to examine colonial legacies, power dynamics, and surface level efforts that persist in Canadian educational institutions, particularly in the province of Ontario. A cultural studies approach provides a critical framework for understanding how systemic structures, rooted in colonial ideologies, continue to shape the educational experiences of Indigenous, Black, racialized, and marginalized communities.[2] It allows us to interrogate not only how educational institutions construct and represent identity but also how they often inadvertently and advertently reinforce the very power hierarchies they claim to challenge. By focusing on how power operates in the classroom and the school system, this article critiques symbolic gestures toward equity and calls for deeper, transformative changes in language,

practice, and policy. It advocates for cross-cultural and transnational solidarity to disrupt and dismantle a white supremacy embedded within educational institutions.

Through these critiques, this article aims to supports educators engaging in anti-racism work both personally and professionally. It encourages educators to reflect on and unlearn colonial narratives that have been passed down through generations. However, this process requires confronting discomfort, particularly for educators who may have previously believed that equity efforts were sufficient but are not recognizing the limitations of these approaches.[3] Discomfort in this context does not refer to a general feeling of unease but rather the productive tension that arises when one is forced to critically examine long-held assumptions, recognize complicity in oppressive systems, and take meaningful steps toward justice.[4] Without this understanding and commitment, failing to dismantle these structures will only perpetuate further harm and trauma for future generations of students. Strategies for dismantling structures of white supremacy in educational systems must evolve alongside our understanding of systemic oppression. This article offers one steppingstone in the ongoing process of disrupting and dismantling colonial frameworks, recognizing that meaningful change requires a sustained and ever-changing to justice.

Disrupting and Dismantling the Classroom

This article intentionally uses the terms “disrupting and dismantling” the classroom rather than “decolonizing” because *true* “decolonization” cannot exist or function with the current education system. In recent years, “decolonizing the classroom” has become a catchphrase used by school boards to acknowledge systemic issues in the education system without enacting substantive change. In “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, critique this trend, noting how “decolonization methods,” or “decolonize student thinking” with

little to "no mention of Indigenous peoples, our/their struggles for the recognition of our/their sovereignty, or the contributions of Indigenous intellectuals and activists to theories and frameworks of decolonization."[5] Tuck and Yang emphasize that when decolonization is used as a metaphor, "it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recentres whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future."[6] Tapji Garba and Sara-Maria Sorentino further argue that decolonization "requires the return of land and the reconstitution of Indigenous geographies," as decolonization is a "project of elimination."[7] Anishinaabe scholar Sheila Cote-Meek adds that the education system is also set up to teach Indigenous students from only a Eurocentric point of view, often disregarding cultural, community, or spiritual knowledge.[8] Similarly, Marie Battiste of the Potlotek First Nation critiques this systemic erasure, writing in *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*:

> Critical education and anti-oppressive education begin with the unpacking of Eurocentric assumptions of education, the normalized discourses and discursive practices that bestow ignorance on students, while it bestows layers of meaningless knowledge on to youth that hide the social and economic structures of Eurocentrism, white dominance, and racism.[9]

Battiste calls on educators to unlearn the dominant Eurocentric narratives and engage with Indigenous systems. She contrasts Eurocentric education with Indigenous frameworks, explaining that:

> Indigenous knowledge comprises the complex set of technologies developed and sustained by Indigenous civilizations. Often oral and symbolic, it is transmitted through the structure of Indigenous languages and passed on to the next generation through modeling, practice, and animation, rather than through the written word. Indigenous knowledge is typically embedded in the cumulative experiences and teachings of Indigenous peoples rather than in a library.[10]

The goal of this article is to provide strategies for disrupting and dismantling colonial educational structures, rather than proposing a metaphorical

decolonization that leaves settler-colonial frameworks intact. To truly decolonize a classroom would require the removing the physical “factory” building (the school); eliminating quality checks (standardized testing); and dismantling of the date-of-product (age-based cohorts), the assembly line of labor and conduct (school work, bells, straight-line formations, desk arrangements, rigid schedules, lunch breaks, hidden and explicit codes of conduct, dress codes), and the carceral system of punishment for students who do not conform to “factory” standard.[11]

Thus, while true decolonization remains unrealistic under current conditions, the goal is to one day create an entirely new and decolonized education system that fundamentally restructures all school systems.

Brief Background on the Canadian Education System

The Canadian education system is deeply entrenched in the colonial legacy of the “divide-in-difference” principle. This concept refers to how colonial structures manipulate differences among racialized and marginalized groups to main to white supremacy. Modeled after the eighteenth-century Prussian factory system, Canada’s schooling system was originally designed to create “docile subjects and factory workers.”[12] This is especially evident in the work of Egerton Ryerson, who in 1844 became the first chief superintendent of education in Upper Canada and also the pioneer architect of Indigenous (officially called Indian) Residential Schools (IRS) in Canada.[13] These “schools” played a pivotal role in enforcing cultural genocide by assimilating Indigenous peoples and communities.[14]

Notably, Canada’s education system is not federally governed; it is provincially managed, meaning changes happen on a provincial and/or board (regional) level. This is an important distinction, especially for readers unfamiliar with Canadian governance, as much of the discourse on decolonization must navigate a complex

landscape of provincial and regional policies and procedures. In Ontario, renaming schools is one of the most visible ways institutions are beginning to acknowledge their colonial past. Several institutions have renamed themselves in light of these violent histories, such as Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly called Ryerson University), Laurel Heights Secondary School in Waterloo (formerly called Sir John A. Macdonald Secondary School), and Hillside Public School in Kitchener (formerly called A.R. Kaufman Public School), just to name a few.[15] However, renaming, while symbolically important, is not enough. It must be seen as a first step in a broader process of disrupting systemic racism embedded in education.

In many cases, efforts to address racism, oppression, and violence in the Ontario school system become mere "band-aid" solutions, which, while well-meaning, fail to address the systemic roots of white supremacy and colonialism. These efforts are often surface level, divisive, and in some cases, perpetuate the very harm they claim to address. Activist, academic, and educator, Amanda Buffalo of the Yukon First Nations describes several instances of the band-aid approach when teaching Indigenous studies or topics: visiting museums to see "how Indigenous peoples used to live" (as though Indigenous communities no longer exist) or engaging with Indigenous cartoons that reinforce racist and colonial stereotypes.[16] A related concept is the "add and stir" model, coined by Battiste, which describes the manufactured and superficial standards of teaching the realities of Indigenous, Black, racialized, and marginalized communities through an approach that embodies a lack of critical thought and uses inauthentic resources. This leaves the system fragmented and unable to educate about the realities of colonialism.[17] For example, colonialism is often framed as a historical narrative, which Battiste argues is intentionally taught to avoid "delving deeper into Indigenous knowledge."[18] This "add and stir" model is also seen in initiatives such as affinity groups (i.e., Muslim or Asian groups) and days of significance (i.e., Orange Shirt Day), which, while necessary and important, often fail to connect back to the systemic roots of racism and oppression.

Opportunities like affinity groups and days of significance are designed to celebrate identities, resist racism, and build relationships, which are important and necessary. However, at times these groups operate in isolation, unintentionally perpetuating the colonial "divide-in-difference" structures. As Audre Lorde argues, that the colonial practice of separation among racialized and marginalized groups is purposefully done to prevent solidarity and collective resistance.[19] Members of these groups often come from a range of intersectional identities, social locations, and lived experiences, complicating the assumption that their struggles are homogenous. For example, anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia are often treated as separate from anti-Indigeneity and anti-Black racism, despite all being rooted in the same colonial structures. These divisions serve to maintain white supremacy and colonialism by preventing racialized and marginalized groups from addressing the core issue of the enduring presence of colonial power structures.

As Angela Y. Davis argues, "transnational solidarity" is essential to dismantling white supremacy frameworks, as it unites movements and peoples against systemic oppression.[20] Similarly, Franz Fanon discusses how the colonized and oppressed must work together to resist colonial structures and the impact of internal colonization.[21] Rather than working in isolation, affinity groups should collaborate to build coalitions, recognizing the shared experiences of racism and oppression. Solidarity between affinity groups is necessary to disrupt and dismantle white supremacy.

Like affinity groups, days of significance, such as Orange Shirt Day, Islamic Heritage Month, and Black History/Brilliance Month, are intended to spotlight a specific racialized or marginalized group or community on a certain day, week, or month of the year, with the intention of raising awareness and celebrating student and community identities. However, these days often become symbolic engagements, disconnected from their original purpose of challenging white supremacy and colonialism. Battiste argues that these "add and stir" efforts are

designed as *distractions,* allowing schools to avoid engaging in the systemic changes necessary to address the root causes of oppression.[22]

For instance, Orange Shirt Day, which is meant to honour the children who were forcibly removed from their families and sent to residential "schools" has, in some cases, been transformed into a day of celebration rather than a somber day of respect for lost lives, a commemoration of survivors, and a recognition of the ongoing impact on Indigenous peoples and communities.[23] This example illustrates the lack of awareness in understanding the significant symbolism the orange shirt and its connection to white supremacy, colonialism, and genocide. While "somber" is not the only way to acknowledge these impacts, the orange shirt is a symbol of power dynamics, hierarchy, oppression, and racism that underpin colonialism.

Ultimately, disrupting and dismantling education requires moving beyond surface level gestures toward systemic and sustained transformation. Understanding how white supremacy and colonial structures, like the "divide-in-difference" principle, continue to shape current education practices and policies is important in dismantling white supremacy. This work requires cross-cultural and transnational solidarity, critical engagement, and a commitment to meaningful structural change in practice and policies, rather than superficial or tokenism representation.

Recommendations for the Classroom

As educators, where do we begin in the process of disrupting and dismantling oppression? One must first become comfortable with the discomfort of resisting the norms of white supremacy. White supremacy is a social construct based on racist ideologies that are embedded into every facet of the education system. Thus, changing how we speak, teach, assess students, and communicate with

their families and communities are starting points in the dismantling process. The following recommendations are meant for K–12 educators, however, in many cases, the suggestions can be adapted to the post-secondary level, as they primarily aim to disrupt and dismantle white supremacy in the classroom and foster inclusive spaces.

It is important to recognize that using these practices may look different depending on a teacher's social location, identity, and experiences. A teacher's race, gender, and cultural background can influence how students perceive these strategies. For example, a racialized educator may encounter different biases when challenging traditional dress codes or when using first names. Challenging such entrenched "rules" or traditions may have differing effects based on whether the educator is male, female, non-binary, Black, Indigenous, or white. Teachers should consider their identities and social location when implementing these recommendations.

1. Building Classroom Community

During the first days of school, educators should emphasize that this is *our* classroom and not *my* or *your* classroom. Allow students the space and opportunity to create their community (i.e., structure, flow, etc.). This shift in language accomplishes several things:

- It allows students to be accountable and responsible for their learning and social experiences.
- It allows students to have agency over what they learn and how they are going to learn it.
- It creates a collectivist mentality, which is counter to the individualistic ways of learning, by teaching students that we are all here to support one another.

2. Getting Rid of the Rigid Formalities

No Hands

Allowing students to ask and answer questions freely without raising hands, encourages spontaneity. The “no hands” rule also removes the fear or stigma students might feel when asking a question. By removing the invisible barriers, students will feel confident and empowered to ask questions at any time.[24] However, it is essential to consider how this approach may impact Indigenous, Black, racialized students or other marginalized groups. Thus, clear guidelines of respectful listening and speaking must be established first before establishing in a classroom. By doing so, this creates an environment where all students will feel empowered to speak up, even the quieter students. Over time, and patience and guidance, students will eventually unlearn the colonial idea of only speaking when addressed, while respecting each other’s voices.

No Policing of Clothing

Policing students’ clothing is deeply embedded in racist, colonial structures. Many school dress codes enforce rules rooted in Eurocentric standards of “respect” and “appropriateness” that often disregard cultural diversity. For instance, the rule requiring students to remove hats indoors, or during the national anthem, stems from Eurocentric traditions rooted in Christianity, dating back to the 1600s.[25] Originally, the “no hat” rule was implemented as another method of control, reinforcing hierarchical authority in schools and discouraging student autonomy. This approach of enforcing “respect” is not neutral, as it embodies a white, Eurocentric viewpoint that excludes other cultural interpretations of respect and identity.[26]

Beyond hats, rules against head wraps, durags, bandanas, or hoodies continue this pattern, failing to account for the diverse cultural expressions present in

today's classrooms.[27] For example, dress codes have historically targeted Indigenous, Black, and other racialized and marginalized students disproportionately, often labeling their clothing or hair choices as "inappropriate" or "distracting." In March 2022, a female student from Wood Street Centre school in Whitehorse, Yukon was told she had been "dress-coded" by teachers and her clothing was too revealing and she needed to change.[28] In 2017, two Black sisters, both teens, were asked to leave their Mystic Valley Regional Charter school in Boston, United States, because their hair extensions were deemed "distracting"; they were issued "infractions" for violating the school dress code.[29] In March 2023, several middle school students at Park West school, Halifax, were sent to the office and asked to remove their keffiyeh (Palestinian scarf), citing the scarf was a "sign of war."[30] Such incidents highlight the cultural bias inherent in dress codes, which often disproportionately impact Indigenous, Black, and other racialized and marginalized students regulating their cultural expressions and enforcing assimilation into white, Eurocentric norms.

Furthermore, dress codes infringe upon students' agency and autonomy over their bodies, limiting their right to self-expression. Policing clothing reinforces the colonial legacy of controlling marginalized groups' appearance and autonomy. Teachers must critically examine and challenge these dress code norms to foster inclusive spaces that celebrate student identity, promote self-empowerment, and address the harmful impacts of racist colonial practices.

No Rows

The concept of classroom rows is based on the factory model of education. At the turn of the twentieth century, classrooms were set up for "product" efficiency, where educators lectured from the front of the class while students sat in fixed desks.[31] Research shows that arranging desks in a circle or other collaborative configurations, rather than traditional rows, promotes classroom community building and is a "key factor in improving student learning."[32] Furthermore,

educators can remove their desks completely from the classroom, to dismantle symbols of hierarchy and illustrate that educators are equal in the process of knowledge sharing.

Use first names

In many Eurocentric educational contexts, it is traditionally considered disrespectful for students to address educators by their first name. This practice reinforces power dynamics and hierarchical structures that position educators as authority figures and students as passive recipients of knowledge. However, educational psychology suggests that breaking down such formalities can shift the classroom environment. Reducing hierarchies in the classroom fosters a collaborative space where students feel empowered and take ownership of their work.[33] Using first names is a way to challenge hierarchy, positioning educators as co-learners rather than gatekeepers of knowledge. Paolo Freire advocates for a liberation education that sets one free, where both teacher and student participate actively in the learning process.[34]

3. Practicing and Integrating Oral Traditions of Knowledge

Many Indigenous cultures have some form of oral traditions of passing along knowledge, traditions, and other elements of culture.[35] There are many ways educators can embed oral traditions into their classrooms, including in knowledge, content, curriculum, and assessment. Two examples include:

- Integrating community circles into the classroom routine.
- Affording students the opportunity to create oral presentations in lieu of writing essays. Oral presentations can be in the form of storytelling, mini-conferences, debating, town hall meetings, large and small group discussions, poetry slams, or open-mic sessions.

Using oral traditions integrates culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and supports classroom diversity by integrating global Indigenous community practices. Embedding oral traditions can support student well-being and their communities and foster a classroom rooted in celebrating their identities, traditions, and ways of knowing.[36]

4. Removal of Traditional Notions of Success

Who defines success? What standards are being upheld to maintain this idea of success? As educators, when thinking of success, be mindful of positionality, social location, explicit and implicit biases, stereotypes, and societal structures rooted in capitalism and white supremacy. Consider the implications of embedded notions of what traditional success has on ongoing suffering and oppression of students. Matthew Knoester and Wayne Au argue that covert forms of racism are found in concepts such as meritocracy or notions of success, where educators are made to believe "that success is purely the result of individual hard work and not the function of social, historical, or institutional processes."[37] The concept of meritocracy oversimplifies and does not engage with the macro- and micro-inequities that significantly impact Indigenous, Black, racialized, and marginalized students. Thus, students and educators should decide together what success will look, sound, and feel like. Here are a few examples of how success can be redefined in the classroom:

- Providing students with open-ended questions to allow all students to feel successful.
- Encouraging students to use their books during assessments, providing them the opportunity to turn-and-talk during evaluations, or providing questions in advance for evaluations.
- Doing away with grade-based assessments to instead focus on feedback and effort-based grading.
- Promoting self-assessment and peer assessment.
- Providing students with choice and voice in alternative assessment strategies, such as blog or letter writing, oral reports, debates, visual art, drama, music,

spoken word, poetry, and open mic events.[38]

5. Teach Beyond the Formal and "Hidden" Curriculum

Historically, the education system in Canada has reflected colonial perspectives, emphasized white Eurocentric narratives, and whitewashed or omitted the contributions of Indigenous, Black, racialized, and marginalized communities. Despite recent efforts made by the Ministry of Education in Ontario to address some of these concerns, the reality is that much of the public education in Ontario still remains outdated and embedded with colonial narratives.[39] Looking specifically at the Ontario social studies curriculum for grades 1 to 8, Indigenous peoples are juxtaposed against the settler colonial imaginary of a peaceful nation building context.[40] At the secondary level (high school), students are not required to take history until grade 10, and when they do have a history class, Indigenous peoples are represented from a deficit lens and a settler colonial perspective.[41] Marie Battiste discusses the purposeful whitewashing of history that aims to avoid delving deeper into issues of violence, trauma, and genocide in nation building.[42]

In addition to the formal curriculum, arguably more destructive is the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum refers to the socialization of students by unconscious and conscious values brought into schools, which can include "social relationships, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, all of which feed processes of exclusion of people of colour."[43] Due to the hidden curriculum, Black and Indigenous students have higher suspension and expulsion rates and are more likely to be streamed into non-academic vocational and technical programs.[44]

In Ontario, the elimination of student streaming in 1999 was an attempt to address concerns of discrimination and inequity associated with the practice. Under the revised system, students in Ontario have the option to choose between academic and applied courses in various subjects offered at the secondary level, including English, sciences, mathematics, geography, history, and French. Academic

courses generally focus on higher-level academic thinking, while applied courses take a more practical approach to education.[45] The intention behind this choice-based system may have been to offer students more flexibility and cater to different learning styles and interests. However, disparities still persist in the current Ontario public school system that raise concerns about equity in the distribution of students across academic and applied courses. Certain groups, including those with lower parental education, lower income, and especially Indigenous and Black students, and some racialized groups such as newcomers or Multi-Language Learners (MLLs), are more likely to be enrolled in applied courses.

In 2015, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), the fourth largest board in North America, reported that Black students had a graduation rate of 69% and Indigenous students had a 50% graduation rate, compared to 84% for white students.[46] Further, the TDSB reported that 53% of Black students and of 48% Indigenous students are more likely to be streamed into applied programs, compared to the 16% of white students who were enrolled in applied studies. In addition, the academic program was 81% white students.[47] Expulsion and policing rates were also disproportionately higher for Black, Indigenous, Eastern Mediterranean, Muslim, and Southwest Asian students in the TDSB primary and secondary schools. Black students only made up 12% of the TDSB student population but represented 48% of all expulsions; Indigenous students comprised 0.3% of the TDSB population with a 1% expulsion rate; and Eastern Mediterranean, Muslim, and Southwest Asian students were 4% of the student population but faced 8% of expulsions.[48] The concentration of specific characteristics among students in applied courses suggests that systemic factors influence educational trajectories that perpetuate inequalities and limit opportunities for students from marginalized backgrounds.

Addressing these disparities requires a comprehensive, large-scale approach that includes examining factors such as curriculum changes, resources, and support

systems. It also involves small acts of targeted interventions and support by providing safe, caring, and inclusive environments for student's physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Thus, if an educator wishes to embrace transforming classrooms in a positive, culturally responsive way, then it is necessary to go beyond the curriculum to disrupt and dismantle embedded ideologies. Regardless of the subject, topic, or grade level, educators need to constantly be aware of and interrogate their social locations as well as their implicit and explicit biases. It is also important for educators to critically question the material provided to them. When teaching any subject, ask students questions to get them thinking critically: Where do they see gaps? Whose story is missing? Where do they see problematic or racist narratives? This knowledge and material can be presented through project-based learning (PBL) or the student-led model, which fosters deeper learning, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. For example, during science class, instead of memorizing facts and terms about ecosystems, students create a project. Here students would plan, research, execute, and evaluate the project of their choice from start to finish with limited teacher involvement or instructions. This hands-on approach to learning empowers students to become active participants in their learning and knowledge consumption, as well as promotes collaboration and problem-solving skills.[49]

6. Going Beyond the "Fluff"

For the purposes of this article, "fluff" refers to the surface level actions that give the appearance of addressing racism or discrimination but lack meaningful change. "Fluff" looks like providing readings or texts by non-white authors, displaying images of "diverse" individuals, or using media featuring people from various backgrounds without deeper engagement. While representation is important, focusing solely on these visible gestures can lead to tokenism rather than transformational change. True transformation requires a sustained

commitment to critically examining everything that shapes the classroom environment, including curriculum, assessment practices, disciplinary policies, and the power dynamics between educators and students. This means going beyond simply incorporating such materials, but engaging in deep critical conversations on white supremacy, colonialism, and systemic inequalities. To further add to this point, it is crucial to integrate multi-perspectives, as to avoid a "single story" or a homogenized narrative.[50]

For example, when discussing Indigenous peoples, it is essential to recognize that the term "Indigenous" is an umbrella term that encompasses a diverse array of cultures, knowledges, languages, beliefs, and peoples from Turtle Island (North America) and beyond. Linda Tuhiwai Smith states the term "Indigenous . . . appears to collectivize many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different."[51] By understanding and conveying the diversity within Indigenous communities, educators can foster a more inclusive representation of Indigenous peoples, rather than reinforcing monolithic representations.

7. Celebrate Student Identity All Day . . . Everyday

When working to dismantle oppressive structures in the classroom, every action must *be intentional and purposeful*. An inclusive approach means acknowledging and celebrating student identities, whether through oral traditions, assignments, and daily conversations. When creating assignments, slideshows, exemplars, and assessments, or when showing videos, Indigenous, Black, racialized, and marginalized students must be seen and reflected. Whether or not the student body is predominantly white, this practice needs to become normalized. Here are some examples of centering student identity:

- Oral Assessments: Offer multiple formats to allow students to demonstrate their learning, such as oral presentations, podcasts, spoken word, poetry slam, artistic representations, community-based projects, or in digital form.

- Cultural Connections: Encourage students to investigate the origin, history, and meaning behind their names, family members/history, ancestors, elders, and/or cultural backgrounds.
- Multi-Language Expression: Provide opportunities for Multi-Language Learners (MLLs) to write and present in their home language. Recognize and celebrate their identity in books, songs, or media.
- Proper Pronouns and Names: When possible (while considering student safety), using proper pronouns when interacting with students.[52] Be proactive, rather than reactive in allowing students to understand the importance of using proper pronouns and names, or the proper pronunciation of names.
- Student Voice: Create a space where class discussions, journal presenting, and class chats are student-led. Further, provide opportunities for students to become the "teacher" and teach their fellow peers about a topic.
- Stereotypes/Bias/Racism: Be **proactive**, rather than reactive when it comes to big topics with students. Have frequent conversations with students about the harm certain words or actions can perpetuate. Create an environment where students feel safe to address racism and discrimination.

Again, the idea is to keep student identity at the forefront of lesson planning and daily interactions. This can be done through daily conversations, projects, or presentations where students share stories that connect their identities and experiences. It is important to note that educators should avoid making assumptions of gender, culture, religion, or ethnicity, as to not perpetuate homogenization of their identity. That each student has a different story, social location, and intersectionality that will create a unique student identity in the classroom. These examples can serve as starting points to an ongoing process to create an inclusive and supportive environment that empowers and centers students.[53]

Assessment and Evaluation

In the colonial education system, assessment and evaluation often uphold Eurocentric norms that prioritize product over process and maintain binary assumptions, such as right versus wrong or pass versus fail.[54] Ardavan Eizadirad

adds that assessment is based on "representing hegemonic norms and standards, effectively dictating what knowledge ought to be 'mastered' by specific ages according to Western developmentalist trajectories."[55] Not only is the evaluation of students affected by these dominant assessment paradigms, but also the training and evaluation of student teachers. Further, Sudhakar Venu describes,

> A glaring weakness of existing teacher education practices is the restricted scope of evaluation of student teachers and its excessively quantitative nature. It is confined to measurement of mainly cognitive learning through annual/terminal tests; skill measurement is limited to a specified number of lessons. The qualitative dimensions of teacher education, other professional capacities, attitudes, and values remain outside the purview of evaluation.[56]

Assessment is an ongoing process of "gathering evidence to determine what students know, understand and can do."[57] Further, it is important to recognize that the notion of "success" varies across cultural contexts and individual experiences, and that teachers' own identities and social locations affect how they interpret and enact assessments.

Disrupting assessment requires the need to unlearn, learn, and relearn new ways of assessing students. It is unfair and unethical to merely assess students on *what* they create or *how* well they perform on a test or quiz. Disrupting and dismantling assessment means focusing on the *process* with little or no emphasis on the product. Mastering the skill is far more essential and relevant to student knowledge and growth than creating an end product used to meet guidelines or reproduce structural harm.[58] Here are some examples of alternative forms of assessment:

- Allow for peer and self-assessment.
- Do away with grade-based assessment and focus on labour-based grading (process over product). Labour-based grading is an alternative form of grading or assessing students with a focus on completion of assignments and mastery

of learning outcomes, rather than letter grades based on individual assignments, quizzes, tests, or exams. Educators can co-create grading contracts or rubrics with students that detail specific criteria to ensure student success. This approach fosters a more holistic approach to assessment and values the process over the final product.[59]
- Embed oral traditions into all subjects (i.e., songs, dance, digital use, and storytelling).
- Emphasize formative assessment (i.e., one-on-one conferencing, spoken word, poetry, small/large group assessment, check-ins, debates, and town hall meetings).
- Provide as many opportunities as possible for cross-curricular connections, that is, have students create art in math or science in nature with Indigenous studies.
- Allow student choice and voice in how they want to be assessed.

Conclusion

In the words of renowned Senegalese novelist Cheikh Hamidou Kane, author of *Ambiguous Adventure*, "the cannon compels the body, the school bewitches the soul."[60] This quote embodies the profound impact of colonial education systems. Cheikh Hamidou Kane and Franz Fanon both argued that what was taught in schools and embedded into societies was far more powerful than the physical acts of colonization.[61] These institutions led the colonized to internalize their subjugation as a form of liberation. The Ontario education system, like many other education systems across the world, remains deeply rooted in the legacy of white supremacy and colonialism, continuing to perpetuate these harmful, and at times violent, ideologies. Both Cheikh Hamidou Kane and Franz Fanon believed that the colonization of the mind stands as the most powerful tool against the colonized, and they have demanded that efforts to dismantle oppression begin within educational institutions by shifting power dynamics that still shape the lived experiences of Indigenous, Black, racialized, and marginalized students.[62]

This article has sought to not only to expose oppressive frameworks within the Ontario school system but to also provide strategies for disrupting the colonial narratives that have persisted across generations. It encourages educators to engage in anti-racism work personally, professionally, and socially, extending their commitment beyond the school walls. The discomfort that accompanies this unlearning and dismantling of deeply embedded colonial narratives should be seen as a necessary catalyst for transformative change. Educators are asked to embrace this discomfort and to recognize that without actively disrupting and dismantling white supremacy systems, we risk perpetuating further harm, violence, and trauma for future generations of students.

By cultivating a transnational solidarity lens and integrating anti-racist, decolonial pedagogies, educators can begin to counter the “bewitching” effect that Cheikh Hamidou Kane describes as the most powerful weapon left behind by the colonizers.[63] Only by liberating the education system from its colonial roots can we create an environment where future students receive an education free from oppressive white supremacy ideologies. This work represents only the beginning, merely a stepping stone in the ongoing process of disrupting and dismantling racist structural systems, with the ultimate hope of “decolonizing” our educational institutions so that all students can thrive as their authentic selves.

Notes

1. Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* (Haymarket Books, 2016). ↩
2. Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History* (Duke University Press, 2016). ↩
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Article details

Aida Al-Thayabeh, "Practical Strategies of Disruption for Dismantling White Supremacy in Ontario's Education System," *Lateral* 14.1 (2025).

https://doi.org/10.25158/L14.1.4

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Lateral is the peer-reviewed, open access journal of the Cultural Studies Association.

ISSN 2469-4053